

HAMPTON VA

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Unity Award winners recognized

Sept. 12, 2013 – A tireless promoter of Hampton’s rich African-American history and a champion for citizens with disabilities were among the many people honored Sept. 12 when the Citizens’ Unity Commission presented the annual Unity Awards.

Established in 2000 to recognize the contributions of individuals, organizations and initiatives that support diversity, the awards took place at the American Theatre, 125 East Mellen St., Hampton.

OUTSTANDING CITIZENS OF THE YEAR

- **Calvin Pearson** is founder and president of Project 1619, a non-profit organization with the goal of promoting Hampton’s rich African American History and the factual story about the arrival of the first Africans in English, North America. The nomination says his efforts helped document the fact that the first Africans were brought ashore at Point Comfort – now Fort Monroe – and not at Jamestown. Pearson says Hampton’s strength lies in the diversity of its people, and “by understanding each other’s cultures, we can peacefully coexist.
- **Monsignor Robert M. Perkins**, retired, has insisted through word, deed and action that members of his church community bring the gospel message to life. His challenge to the congregation at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church was “to take care of each other no matter what racial, cultural or gender division exist.” The nomination says he had a vision to develop a forum of open, honest and sometimes painful dialogue that led to the creation of the city’s Circles of Diversity effort, which brings active members of different congregations together.
- **Rev. Dr. Richard Wills**, pastor of First Baptist Church of Hampton, has fostered healthy racial and cultural relationships by engaging in a partnership ministry with Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and the Circles of Diversity program. Wills teaches his church members by example, according to the nomination, and encourages others to take a loving and inclusive approach to valuing diversity.
- **Ellen Shackelford** has worked tirelessly to educate Hampton citizens on the experiences of people living with disabilities. She facilitates classes at Thomas Nelson Community College and has taken the challenges of her own experience and turned them into a commitment to educate others. The nomination says she created Buggy Buddies, a program to help people

with disabilities when they go shopping, and she has been an advocate for providing the disabled with assistance at Hampton gas pumps.

UNITY AWARD WINNERS

- **Kathryn “Kasia” Grzelkowski**, president and CEO of the Arc of the Virginia Peninsula, has been a champion for educating the public on the life experiences and capabilities of ARC clients. Because of her efforts, the nomination said, “the Hampton community is more tolerant in their judgment and more open to sharing their neighborhoods with groups of citizens who want the opportunity to work and to live safely across the city.”
- **BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, the Hindu Workship Center**, has been particularly open and welcoming to city elected leaders and citizens at large, according to the nomination. “The Hindu congregation has gone out of its way to dispel myths and misperceptions about their faith practices and extend its welcome to Hampton citizens of various religious faiths.”
- **Joan Harper-Neely** is a national board certified teacher at W.M. Cooper Elementary Magnet School for Technology and the coordinator of the “A Star Achievers Academy YMCA program.” The academy offers a hands-on engineering, science, art and physical activities summer camp. The nomination says the students “learn that there are people in their community who care about them regardless of their skin color or living conditions at home.”
- **Sandra Triolet-Berglund**, sales and events manager of the Hampton Cinebistro, has established a partnership that provides a comfortable venue for cross-cultural interaction. The nomination says that the events there “bring groups of people of diverse backgrounds and life experiences together to enjoy a film and to explore their varied views, opinions and experiences.”

HONORABLE MENTION

- **Tammy Thomas Hopson** is founder and CEO of Image Design Consulting Company. The nomination says she used her gifts to create a program for life where she offers interactive activities for children and adults in civility and kindness.
- **The Olde Wythe Neighborhood Association** has demonstrated a commitment to creating an inclusive environment where all people regardless of color or culture feel welcomed.
- Olde Wythe is one of the most racially, religiously and economically diverse neighborhoods in Hampton. The nomination says that the emphasis on diversity and inclusion works well for the greater good of the neighborhood.
- **Dianne F. Peterson**, President of Sister Cities of Hampton, has led the charge of broadening the perspectives of Hampton citizens, especially young people, as to the value of international understanding and personal interaction with people from diverse cultures. The nomination says that the vision of Sister Cities is to promote friendship between

citizens/students/businesses through exchanges and personal interactions. Hampton Sister Cities are Vendome, France and Anyang, South Korea.

- **Margaret Wilson** and **Claude Vann III** continue to keep the pilot light of the Aberdeen Garden Historic Museum producing a steady flow of knowledge about the Black residents of Hampton in 1935 who lived and gardened in the Homestead Project that was designed and built by Black professionals and laborers. The nomination says they work diligently to tell the stories of the diversity among the Black people who did not all see themselves as solely African Americans, but embraced the varied differences of their ancestry and cultural backgrounds.

The Citizens' Unity Commission promotes and sponsors activities and events that bring diverse citizens together. Diversity education is available for all businesses, schools, etc., dealing with community and workplace. For more information, go to www.hampton.gov/unity

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